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SUBJECT: BELIZE: ALLEGATIONS MADE AGAINST FORMER BELIZE CITY
MAYOR

REF: BELIZE 211

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

¶1. (U) The recently replaced mayor of Belize City faces allegations of financial improprieties during his final days in office. Separately, the new mayor of Orange Walk Town has announced a financial audit to clean house. The allegations of corruption come as no surprise in the wake of recent municipal elections in which Zenaida Moya and other United Democratic Party (UDP) candidates were swept to power by an electorate weary of the series of financial scandals which have dogged the ruling People's United Party (PUP) in recent years at both the national and local levels (REFTEL). Prime Minister Said Musa must call national elections no later than 2008; whether his PUP government can rebuild the electorate's confidence by then is an open question. End Summary and Analysis.

¶2. (SBU) Former Belize City Mayor William David Fonseca, the younger brother of GOB Minister of Home Affairs Ralph Fonseca, reportedly has bounced 12 checks worth approximately BZ\$30,000 to the Belize City Council between October 2005 and February 2006. Fonseca returned nearly BZ\$30,000 to the city on Friday March 17. Additionally, local media have reported that Fonseca received an estimated BZ\$237,000 in "salary advances and personal loans" and BZ\$155,000 from "what was listed as a social assistance program."

¶3. (SBU) Recently elected Mayor Zenaida Moya filed a complaint with police on Monday, March 20. Local print media noted that "Moya said that the [City] Council's legal counsel advised them to file a report directly to police, rather than submitting it to the DPP's office." Bouncing checks is a criminal offense in Belize; however, sources have indicated to the Embassy that police may drop charges against Fonseca because of a "lack of evidence." If the charges are dropped, Embassy sources report that Moya and her council may file a civil suit.

¶4. (SBU) Post ConOff has contacted INL/C/CP concerning the possible revocation of Fonseca's visa and/or beginning the 212(f) process based on the following March 14 interview between David Fonseca and Channel Seven News in Belize:
Interviewer: "Mayor Moya has said that it is a criminal act, in her opinion, particularly the cashing of a bounced check, the day before elections when they [sic] had been nine other bounced checks before. What's your response to that?"
Fonseca: "Probably it is, probably it is a criminal act yeah."
Interviewer: "And you are responsible for that?"
Fonseca: "Yeah it's me."

Interviewer: "So you are guilty of a criminal charge?"

Fonseca: "I am not saying so, I said probably."

Interviewer: "Well either you are or you aren't."

Fonseca: "Well like I said because the funds were used for a particular purpose, not for me, I don't consider anything that I have done criminal. My only crime that I have committed, as far as I am concerned, is trying to help too many people. That is the only crime that I've committed, trying to help too many people."

15. (U) Separately, according to a March 21 newscast on Belize's Channel Five, new UDP Mayor in Orange Walk Town Ravel Gonzalez stated "I informed the public that we're doing a financial auditing. And what we have found so far is that the council had decided to pay themselves thirty percent severance pay . . . the amounts that they were paid and it has amounted so far to approximately seventy thousand dollars that were paid out to the Mayor, the previous mayor and councillors and now we are finding legal help. And if it does end up being illegal, which we believe it is, then we definitely will take this to court." According to the Channel Five newscast, Mayor Gonzalez "has yet to officially inform the former Mayor and councillors of their investigation and projected course of legal action."

DIETER